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ABSTRACT

This is one in a series of eight discussion pamphlets produced by the Writing Across the Curriculum Project dealing with some of the issues connected with writing in the schools and their relation to learning. This pamphlet focuses on project work in the humanities. It uses examples of the writings of 14- to 16-year-old students to demonstrate the range of function and intended audience evident in writing from first-hand experience when students are given freedom in their choice of form and in the pace of their writing. (FL)

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THE SCHOOLS COUNCIL AND LONDON UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION SURVEY PROJECT WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM 11–13 YEARS

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KEEPING OPTIONS OPEN

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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A geriatric hospital is pretty much the same as any other hospital. As soon as I walked in I could smell the cleanliness which literally made me feel ill and depressed.

I would really hate to be put in a place like that, don't get me wrong, the staff are pleasant enough so is the building but the atmosphere is dead! The only entertainment they get is the tv and each other. None of the patients talk to each other much. Most of the people I talked to said the food was good, the staff were fine but they wanted to go home

It is enough to kill anyone being put in a place like that! It is really dull and quiet, nothing seems to happen. The old folks spend all day, every day, sitting and looking at one another. Some are out of their minds One woman lay in bed screaming. She sounded exactly like a monkey in a zoo. It was enough to give me the creeps anyway Most people had relatives who visited them regularly If I

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FOREWORD

The Schools Council/London University Institute of Education Project: *Writing Across the Curriculum* was set up for two purposes: (i) to disseminate the findings of a research study into *The Development of Writing Abilities, 11–18*, directed by Professor James Britton and carried out over five years by a team from the London University Institute of Education, and (ii) to work in any appropriate way with teachers of *all* subjects in an attempt to relate the general ideas of the Project to the problems and strengths of pupils within their own schools, and to pool teachers' expertise in attempting to solve some of the language problems common to all subjects.

One of the ways in which the Project works is to produce discussion pamphlets which take up some of the issues connected with writing in schools and their relation to learning–for example, how children assimilate new information, the pros and cons of talking versus writing, and the ways in which different audiences and different purposes affect the writing.

We are now publishing two pamphlets concerned with writing in science and in the humanities. In both pamphlets we have included summaries of the main findings of the research into *The Development of Writing Abilities, 11–18*.

Writing in Science in Schools was written in first draft at a weekend seminar with a small number of science teachers, and it examines, among other matters, the use of worksheets in science lessons. The ideas discussed in the context of science teaching have, of course, a much wider application and we think that any teachers who use worksheets will be interested in the points raised by the science teachers.

Keeping Options Open is mainly concerned with project work in the humanities. The focus in the examples of pupils' writings is on the effects of first-hand experience and the freedom of the pupils to present their ideas in their own ways.

Patterns of Writing in Secondary Schools

The Schools Council Writing Research project, based at the London Institute of Education, set out to describe the kinds of writing produced in school, in all subjects of the curriculum, by pupils of 11 to 18 years. Believing that the ability to write was not a single all-embracing ability, as is sometimes assumed, but rather a cluster of related abilities, they tried to find ways of distinguishing the process of writing in one way (of writing a sonnet for example) from the process of writing in another (say a note to the milkman). As they worked out possible categories they applied them to a sample of over 2000 pieces of written work collected from 65 secondary schools scattered throughout the country. In the final stages, when the set of categories was agreed upon, all the pieces of writing were sorted by teachers in accordance with the descriptions supplied to them. The degree of agreement was high enough to satisfy the researchers that the distinctions they had tried to make among the writings were real and could be discerned.

We have described in an earlier pamphlet, *Why Write?* the two sets of categories of writing the Unit devised, the first a division by *function* (what the writing's for) and the second by *sense of audience* (who is it for?). We go on here to report some of the results obtained when the categories were applied to the 2000 pieces of writing that composed the sample.* In doing so, however, we should point out that the restrictions attaching to the sample are such that the figures can do no more than *suggest* the kind of results you might expect to find if you examined the work on another sample of schools. They tell us a good deal about this particular set of schools, and give us a rough idea of what we might expect to find more generally.

It is hardly surprising that the kinds of writing produced in one curriculum subject differ from those produced in another. For the subjects that figured most prominently in the sample, here are the percentages to be found in the three main function categories, taking one subject at a time.

* The results in full will be found in *The Development of Writing Abilities, 11–18*, MacMillan & Co. (in the press).

FUNCTION BY SUBJECT–TABLE A

	TRANSACTIONAL	EXPRESSIVE	POETIC	MISCELLANEOUS
ENGLISH	34	11	39	16
HISTORY	88	0	2	10
GEOGRAPHY	88	0	0	12
R. I.	57	11	12	20
SCIENCE	92	0	0	8

It was one of the chief intentions of the Writing Research Project to provide a description of writing which could be used in plotting the way children develop in their ability to write. The following table is again concerned with the main function categories, but shows how the percentages change (taking alternate years) from the beginning to the end of secondary schooling (in these particular schools).

FUNCTION BY YEAR–TABLE B

	TRANSACTIONAL	EXPRESSIVE	POETIC	MISCELLANEOUS
YEAR 1	54	6	17	23
YEAR 3	57	6	23	14
YEAR 5	62	5	24	9
YEAR 7	84	4	7	5

From these two tables it is clear that in some subjects the tasks set by these teachers were almost all transactional ones, and that in all subjects taken together the number of transactional tasks increased considerably throughout the years at school. This category, in fact, dominates the work. We find a similar pattern for one of the sense of audience categories, that of the teacher as examiner: the two features are likely, we suggest, to be two ways of revealing a single tendency. Here are the percentages for sense of audience categories taken a year at a time.

AUDIENCE BY YEAR–TABLE C

	Trusted Adult	Pupil-Teacher Dialogue	Teacher as Examiner	Peer Group	Public	Miscellaneous
YEAR 1	2	51	40	0	0	7
YEAR 3	3	45	45	0	1	6
YEAR 5	2	36	52	0	5	5
YEAR 7	1	19	61	0	6	13

We might tentatively conclude that there is also a connection between the small and generally declining percentages in the teacher as trusted adult category in this table and the similar figures for writing in the expressive function in table B.

If we compare our hopeful expectations with the findings in general, it seems that two major comments must be made. First it is disappointing to find that in a set of what was in fact ten categories of sense of audience two of those categories alone (and both of them 'teacher' categories) absorbed 92% of the writings.

Secondly, we cherished particular views about the educational value of expressive writing. Whether in talk or writing expressive language is *par excellence* the language of discovery, of exploring and trying out new ideas; and when it comes to writing, it seemed to us that the expressive, being the form of writing nearest speech, had a key role to play as the matrix from which more sophisticated forms would be, by a process of increasing differentiation, developed as more experience was gained. This hypothesis on the part of the research team could certainly not be corroborated from the evidence: expressive writing in the first first year amounted to no more than 6% of the work–and that leaves little scope for the fanning out they had looked for.

What sort of tasks are the pupils performing when they write transactionally? The sub-categories of this function give us some idea of the range of possibilities.

TRANSACTIONAL

INFORMATIONAL	CONATIVE (PERSUASIVE)
1. RECORD	1. REGULATIVE
2. REPORT	2. PERSUASIVE
3. GENERALISED NARRATIVE OR DESCRIPTION	
4. LOW LEVEL GENERALISATION	
5. GENERALISATION–CLASSIFICATION	
6. SPECULATION	
7. THEORISING	

Up to the end of the fifth year almost all the transactional writing in the sample fell into the first five informational categories. It appeared largely to be the pupils' attempts to set down in writing *what they already knew* (and mostly for a teacher audience they knew knew it better). There was rarely any sense that they were engaging in an ongoing dialogue in which new ideas could be aired and explored. Rather the writing was clearly regarded in most instances as an end product– an account of something that had already happened, whether this was an experiment in science or a class discussion or earlier reading– or a day out.

There were hardly any writings by pupils younger than sixteen which could be categorised as speculative, theoretical or persuasive. Does this mean that below that age pupils are incapable of speculation or of putting forward their own opinions on paper? In their concluding remarks on Stage One of the research, the team reflected that 'for whatever reason, curricular aims did not include the fostering of writing that reflects independent thinking; rather attention was directed towards classificatory writing which reflects information in the form in which both teacher and textbook traditionally present it'.

Changing the Audience and the Situation

One of the jobs of the Development Project has been to keep

an eye open for any writing in schools which has played a more integral part in the individual's efforts to learn than the bulk of the earlier sample appeared to do. Such writing may fall into any one of the three main function categories, including the transactional, but it will be more likely to have an audience other than teacher as examiner and the writer's own thoughts and attitudes will be there as well, meshed in with the observations and the facts that he has been confronted with in one form or another–on a worksheet, perhaps, or in a book or in some way from the teacher.

On occasions we have suggested to teachers ways in which the writing audience and situation may be changed from the 'teacher as examiner evaluating information' so that the nature of the writing task–and of the writing–may change too. Francis Cleary's report of what happened when woodwork classes were organised on a shop floor basis for the day, which we printed in Pack 3, is one such example, and Ricky's spilled out thoughts about his plans for making his Gnat Killer dagger (Pack 2) is another.

In this pamphlet we have collected together some writings from one of the schools with which we have had close contact–Countesthorpe College in Leicestershire. As many readers will already know, the teachers at Countesthorpe had already made far-reaching audience and situation changes which affected the ethos of the whole school quite independently of the Writing Project. As a staff they had agreed from the start that their relationship with students should be based on a principle of mutuality and that wherever possible, choice should be built into the curriculum.

We have obtained, from a small group of pupils studying Humanities in their fourth and fifth year, writings and comments which we found encouraging for several reasons: they reflect a wider range of writing audience and function than generally appears to be the case in the later stages of secondary schooling; the fact that external examinations were approaching does not seem to have operated restrictively. We know, in fact, that the teachers had made a determined effort to keep writing options open instead of cutting them down. Their success is

reflected in the further fact that we didn't have to hunt for examples; writing of the kind that we quote here was not exceptional. Another heartening indication that writing was regarded fairly widely as an activity that had point and purpose, was that many of the students to whom we talked were enthusiastic about what they had written. They saw writing as a genuine form of communication.

Self Chosen Projects

Significantly perhaps, a considerable part of the students' time in Humanities (basically Social Studies/English) is occupied with project work of their own choosing. They are free to spend as long as they want on a project—collecting materials, discussing their work with the teacher, writing about it. In Susan's case, with her work on old age, the time spent on it in the fourth year varied from week to week—other projects intervened, but in the background there was continuing interest in this particular study, kept alive partly as a result of regular visits to an old people's home and to a 'Tuesday' club at school for local old age pensioners. When I first saw her folder of writing about old age, towards the end of her second term in the fourth year, it contained several accounts of visits she had made, books and articles that she had read and interviews with voluntary groups concerned about old people. She was very clear in her own mind about which pieces she regarded as most valuable and satisfying; those in which she recorded her own visits and encounters with the old. Here is one of her accounts, written soon after she started on this study.

> 10.10.73
>
> B . . . geriatric hospital is pretty much the same as any other hospital. As soon as I walked in I could smell the cleanliness which literally made me feel ill and depressed.
>
> I would really hate to be put in a place like that, don't get me wrong, the staff are pleasant enough so is the building but the atmosphere is dead! The only entertainment they get is T.V. and each other. None of the patients talk to each other much. Most of the people I talked to said the food was good, the staff were fine but they wanted to go home.

It is enough to kill anyone being put in a place like that! It is really dull and quiet, nothing seems to happen. The old folks spend all day every day, sitting and looking at one another. Some are out of their minds. One woman lay in bed screaming, she sounded exactly like a monkey in a zoo. It was enough to give me the creeps anyway. Most people had relatives who visited them regularly. If I was the daughter of one of the women there I would certainly hate leaving my mother in a depressed place for even a day. I know that it is difficult to cope with old people and lift them around when you have got families of your own to deal with but I'd rather my parents died at home together or at least in familiar personal surroundings not a place where I would feel I was sent to die anyway.

I would feel that instead of waiting I would want to finish my life quick, die young. Anything to avoid being put in any sort of care.

I walked around like a cheshire cat, a grin or smile permanently fixed on my face, most people must have thought I was mad. I just laughed about any stupid thing. It seems ridiculous to me now, but that is how I felt. I could not help it. I have always had a secret dread for hospitals and would not be too keen on going back to B . . . again!

When I asked Susan whether she felt she'd learnt anything as a result of doing this project she said one of the things that struck her was the way old people seemed to be treated like children 'once they get past the age of sixty–like at the Tuesday club, sort of "come on dear" . . . ' She added that her own attitude to old people had changed too: 'I was more likely to mock them and just laugh at them before, but now I sort of respect them more and feel sorry for them–it's awful'.

There is the strong impression that her contact with old people–both in the hospital, the Home and the club, has given her something to communicate which she has felt and thought about a great deal. When I asked her why she preferred basing what she wrote on her own first hand experience, she said 'because if you get it out of books, then the people marking it . . . know anyway'; about this particular project she commented 'I don't think there's anything in the project that she (the teacher) really knew about. I mean she knows about old age and that, but it's mainly my opinions of old age and what I've found out from old age . . . '

Perhaps it is this sense of freedom to put forward her own opinions, along with the confidence that they will be valued by the teacher, that makes it possible for Susan to 'write as she thinks', her thoughts scanning back over the experience of the visit to discover in retrospect what she has made of it all:

> As soon as I walked in I could smell the cleanliness which . . . made me feel ill and depressed.
>
> I would really hate to be put in a place like that . . . the atmosphere is dead.
>
> It is enough to kill anyone being put in a place like that.
>
> If I was the daughter of one of the women there I would certainly hate leaving my mother in a depressive place for even a day.
>
> I would feel that instead of waiting I would want to finish my life quick, die young.
>
> It was such a release to get out I could not stop myself laughing.

We can see how the recollection of what happened is combined here with self-awareness about her own responses, generalisations which place the hospital in a wider context and speculations about 'what would happen if . . .'

Writing from First Hand Experience

It may be that the need to write in this flexible way (moving from specific details *about* what happened to a variety of comments–analytic, emotive, speculative–*related to* what happened) is more powerfully present when the writing is about the writer's own experience than when it is about someone else's writing, for which, in a sense, the thinking and shaping have already been done. The feeling that there is nothing more to say about what someone else has already said may be why Susan dismissed 'getting it out of books' as 'just boring–just textbook rubbish', although she had in fact written some quite competent pieces based on what she had read. In the piece we have just quoted, however, Susan's own feeling and thoughts had already been directly involved *at the time of the visit*–she is not having to struggle to internalise those of another writer. Further, the

school situation encouraged her to value her own responses so that there were no pressures on her to censor them out when she came to write about her visit; hence the expressive* nature of her writing.

Susan's attitude to books is similar to that of a second-year girl who had written an interesting 'bird project' based on visits to various places in the locality. When asked why she had decided to do it, she said straight away 'I knew we'd be going out' and added later that she preferred this kind of project to what she called 'school' projects because 'school projects are boring—there's nothing like going out and things like that—you have leaflets and . . . I get fed up of doing what I know'. Perhaps more children than we realise get the impression that they 'already know' something in the sense that there is nothing fresh to learn, because it is already there—in the book in front of them—all completed and finished before they've even begun on it.

At any rate writing about other writing certainly produces a great deal of generalised classificatory work in school, sometimes perhaps at the expense of more expressive or reflective thinking-it-out-as-you-go writing. By comparison, writing about first hand experience seems to allow for a wider range of audience and function more successfully. We do not want to imply by this that experiences and insights which can be gained at second hand through reading what someone else has written are never of value. All the students whose writings we quote in this pamphlet had read fairly extensively 'round' the subjects which they had chosen. The point we would like to make is rather about the value of reading which *feeds into the ongoing concerns of the reader*; if his interest is aroused sufficiently for him to choose to find other writing about a topic which concerns him, then the gap between writer and reader is already half way to being bridged. It does seem though that extending the field of

*Often the threat of 'having to write it up' may not only censor out expressive writing but may also inhibit the thinking that leads to such writing, with the result that any kind of personal analysis in retrospect (about either first or second hand experience) may be discouraged by the expectation that the teacher is only interested in 'the facts'. c.f. Nigel and Gerald, *From Talking to Writing* pp 14–18.

study to include real people and real places ('I knew we'd be going out') has considerable potential for keeping learning options open. It also enables students to find their own ways of assimiiating new experiences and thus to convert them into additional 'knowledge'. For this reason we include two further examples (taken from fifth year Community Studies folders) of writing which followed doing rather than reading.

What it's like to be mentally handicapped Jenny W

I suppose, thinking about it, I've always wanted to know more about mental illness and the handicapped. Also a hidden ambition was I wanted to teach the mentally handicapped. So I thought this a perfect way to get to know in therory about the subject and get to do some practical as well. Ever since a child I've wondered about my uncle who is severely mentally handicapped; and I've seen him in tantrums and moods, so I've grown up with some knowledge; I know a lot of people get awfully frightened at the thought of mentally handicapped people and being with them. Only because society does not accept anything we regard as abnormal and conditions us to reject, put them in a hospital away from the public. Thank goodness, today this is being overcome. I started really doing voluntary work at garden parties for the mentally and physically handicapped, then as my interest in the subject developed I started visiting G . . . hopital from school and now go to the C.A.R.E. village at S . . . just outside Leicester on Saturdays; And I thoroughly enjoy my work and I am learning more with every visit . . .

She continues in another paper in her folder:

I remember well my first visit to G . . . hospital. It was a dull afternoon in September, cold but crisp. C . . . , a teacher, took us to the hospital. We were laughing and joking all the journey, perhaps because we wished to hide how nervous we were deep inside. The main building is a big house. A long driveway down to the house is surrounded by trees. It looked like something out of a film set. You wouldn't know the occupants were hundreds of mentally ill people.

Eventually arriving, we walked round the grounds with C . . . meeting and chatting to various patients that were walking or keeping themselves busy. We visited the children's ward. A little boy sat outside on the slabs and watched us attentively, not responding to our smiles. I remember the terrible smell in the children's ward. They were in rooms and rushed to the glass door as we approached and pressed their faces against it. Some just sat there in corners and others didn't even notice us.

We walked past the main house towards the industrial ward where I was to spend my alternate Wednesday afternoons from today. From the outside it resembled a small factory with muffled glass windows and the double main door. Entering I was confronted by the same smell as the children's ward, only not so strong. I felt sure to spend an afternoon in this stench would make me sick. I wasn't sure what to expect. I'd met mentally retarded people before but never worked with them.

We were introduced to Mr A . . . who, with two nurses and a Mr J . . . , ran the occupational therapy. He told us about the occupational ward and its functions. He showed us adjoining rooms where specialist workers made wicker baskets and toys. My first impression of the ward was that it was so drab, very clinical. They had made a bit of an attempt to liven it up with posters and now they've even acquired a radio with speakers but the walls were still that drab grey-green colour. They seemed to be relatively happy and were very anxious to meet us. We made notes and walked around attempting to talk; most of them were very pleased to talk to us. I noticed their need for touch and affection. One girl, D . . . , started to pour out her problems. Now I realise it is her way of acquiring sympathy and attention. To every new visitor she puts on the crying act. They were all partaking in some small activity, e.g. packing cocktail sticks and making boxes.

At about 3.15 they all had tea and one of the women washed up. I found them beautiful people and so affectionate. I soon learnt all their names pretty well and all their particulars, what they did last night, who their boyfriends/girlfriends were. Once you gained their confidence it was all go. You couldn't shut them up, it was great.

Here, as in Susan's writing about her visit to the geriatric hospital, there is varied thinking going on—informative, reflective, perceptive, appreciative.

Jenny B's Visits to Edith

Another girl chose to make a study of the grandmother of one of her friends as her major project for the Community Studies course. Edith was senile and had been taken in by her daughter (Cynthia) as she was quite incapable of looking after herself anymore. Jenny visited Edith regularly (they lived on the

same council estate) from September 1973 to February 1974 when the old lady was taken ill and died in hospital. She wrote down what Edith said verbatim, so her diary of these visits, extracts from which are given below, is another kind of first hand writing which makes interesting reading for a more public audience than just the teacher.

18. 9. 73 Persons present: Edith, Cynthia, Penny, Shirley and me

Edith is sitting on the sofa next to Shirley and we're talking about a tall dark handsome bloke we met at Bailey's last night and saying what a Casanova he was and she's saying: 'Yes, he looks that way, he looks like him'. Shirley's just asked her to tell me her life story but she says she don't know how to do it.

She's now rumbleing on . . . 'Oh dear. Arn't you very well, oh, I'm glad you're well'. She's now screwing her face up and looking at her hands. 'One, two, three, four.'

She's now looking at me. 'It's nice, I like it. No, it's all right dear, thank you very much, bless you. Yes. Yes. My word isn't he quick.' She's scratching at her skirt again and Shirley's just told her to stop it so she says 'I see, well they're big you see'. She's just pulled her jumper up to make it look like she's got a big chest, she says 'I like to make a laugh' it's nice cos we're all laughing at her.

She's scratching again and she says 'I've only had one, I don't know where it came from'.

She's just sitting and smiling now, hang on, she's laughing now because Shirley told her that she looks like something out of Psycho.

Shirley's just pulled her nose so she said 'ow, I've only got one nose. I'll have to buy lots of them, thank you very much, gentlemen'.

Everyone's getting fed up of her now so they've told her to shut up. It won't last long though.

1st November

She's walking around the room fiddling about with everything. I'll just ask her what she's doing. 'I've got some to send tomorrow for Americans. Yours was a good, wasn't it Cynthia?' She's just said to Marie 'Can I turn this telly back so it will be another time?' Marie said 'Yes if you want'. 'Oh thank you very much, I'll go and fetch one.'

I'm just going to show her a photograph of herself. She's showing it to me and saying 'It's me, you wouldn't believe it, that's a good one,

I don't look fat there'. She's blowing her cheeks out. 'There I am again, you get sick to death of them, thank you very much dear, thank you.'

25th December

The first thing I'll say to Edith is 'Merry Christmas'. She's just smiling at me. I'll tell her I've got a Christmas present for her and give it to her. 'Thank you dear, mm, yes, mm.' She's put it on her knee. With a bit of help she finally opens it and says 'Thank you, oh it's a nice one isn't it, yes, yes it is' and she put it on her knee again. It's a pity she doesn't understand Christmas, I don't think she really realises her son is here even. Poor thing, still at least she's not spending it alone like many old people will.

26th January

I went round and got the shock of my life, Edith is in hospital. Cynth called the doctor this morning and he sent for an ambulance to take her in hospital because she's got a fractured hip.

29th January

The operation has been cancelled because Edith isn't strong enough. She's got a drip in her, but she looks a lot better, she's more talkative. I'll ask her if she's alright. 'Yes thank you. I'm a lot better, I'm fine. Are you dear?' I'm okay, it's her I'm worried about. She looks very tired I'll ask her if she is. 'Yes, just a little dear.' She's chattering away to herself and I'm very glad for a change. I can't quite make out everything she's saying because she's still not got her bottom teeth in. She's trying to ger her hand out of the covers and she's touching my face now and saying how lovely I am. That's really nice. She's took hold of my hand and I feel really upset, my eyes keep watering. I'll have to say goodbye now. 'Yes dear, goodbye and thank you dear, yes, thank you.'

17th February

Today Edith passed away as far as I know in her sleep. I was very upset when I heard and I couldn't stop crying and thinking about her, even though it probably was for the best.

21st February

Today was Edith's funeral. Edith's two sons, Cynth, Penny and I went went in the funeral car and although it was quiet and sad, it was a

beautiful funeral with lots of gorgeous flowers. I couldn't believe she was in the coffin.

Why write? It's sometimes difficult to give a good reason when talking or doing or reading would have achieved what is to be learnt just as well, perhaps better. But here, unless Jenny had written down exactly what Edith said and did, she would never have been able to convey so poignantly the old lady's personality—and her plight. Her recorded visits are conveyed sympathetically rather than sentimentally and again the function of the writing is many-faceted. It is partly to inform and in the sense that it records what happens we could classify it as transactional writing. But in so far as the writing is also a vehicle for Jenny's own responses ('I'd love to know what she's thinking about . . . I feel really upset, my eyes keep watering . . . It's a pity she doesn't understand Christmas, I don't think she really realises that her son is here even') the writing is expressive—moving overall perhaps towards the poetic as Edith emerges Ophelia-like from the words on the page.

Interviewing People

Edith was really too senile to be 'interviewed' by Jenny as her mind wandered too unpredictably from one passing thought to another. Our next two pieces are both based on situations in which people outside the school were asked for their views. For Steve (4th year) it was the first time that he had based any project work on his own observations. He comments on his work about 'The Students' Demo' as follows:

> A piece of work like this made a pleasant change for me as it was the first time I have ever done anything from first hand information. I was actually at the Demo and interviewed people instead of reading about it afterwards. I would like to do more of my work in this way . . . I find work of this kind by far the most interesting that I have ever done and feel that it is of more value for these reasons: It helps me with talking to people if I interview them for school work and I will always have to talk to people other than those who I know. If I can go to a protest and then write about it then I can go from there and decide what else I want to know about it. It is like having a

video-tape of the protest—I have all I want to know (hopefully) on paper and ready for use whenever I want it.

This capacity of written language to capture impressions, and in that sense to hold the options open for further reference and possible modifications later on, was also mentioned by Susan:

> I think it helps to write things down because you can look back and you can remember better from that because if you don't write it down you forget your first impressions of places . . . When you go somewhere the first time it's nice after a few times to look back and find—compare your first impressions with the one you've got at the moment . . . Then you can do another piece of work comparing the two.

Interviewing people to discover what their opinions are about a particular subject is a kind of half way stage between relying entirely on one's own experience and using books. For Steve it provided him with a number of different angles on the Students' Demo.

> In our interviewing we got three main opinions these are . . .
>
> 1) It's a complete waste of my time and yours.
> (This came from the two elderly women)
>
> 2) It's worth trying but I don't think you will get anywhere.
> (This came from one of the students)
>
> 3) Yes it is worth it and I think they will succeed.
> (This came from one of the students and the policeman)

For Alison, who chose to do her Community Studies project on adoption, interviewing two friends of the family who had themselves adopted two children gave her a more immediate contact with the adoptive situation (from the parents' point of view) than simply reading about it could have done, and her sense that she is drawing on real experience is reflected in the writing.

> —After being accepted they had a wait of fourteen months before anything further happened. They had asked for a little boy but Jean said that if she was adopting now she wouldn't make that stipulation. For the first six months after being accepted Jean said that she was really keyed up and ready to receive the baby, but as time went by this faded a little, as Martin said, 'You can't stay pregnant forever!' so when the letter came saying that there was a six week old baby

waiting to be adopted it was a mad rush to get everything ready.

–Martin and Jean had a great deal of support from their close relatives who were all delighted that they were going to adopt and some of their closest friends were already adoptive parents.

–'The only odd comments we got were from people who were near strangers. I remember one distant relative of Martin's before we actually adopted David, but after we had started telling people. He came up to us and said "I think that's a wonderful thing you are going to do! It's very Christian of you" as if we were going to take a poor ragged orphan into our home, when all the time we were desperate to have a child.'

–We talked a bit about matching and Martin and Jean thought that on the whole it was better if the two sets of parents' intelligence was matched so that intelligent adoptive parents with more to offer an intelligent child would have at least as much chance of having a bright child as if he was born to them.

–Finally Jean told me about the most difficult stage of the adoption, 'it was when we were childless. The attitudes we met then were far more hurtful than any we've met since we adopted. It's absolutely amazing how people assume that you are childless by choice. We may have had some tactful friends who never mentioned it but the number of people who said quite openly "Well when are you going to have a family then?" or "It's all very well for you having holidays abroad, you won't be able to do than when you've got a family" things like that at that stage when we were desperately wanting children were very hurtful and at that stage you don't particularly want to say to people that you are trying to have a family and can't, it's very private.'

Anecdote, discussion, honest comments from someone who knows from experience what it's like–it gives a sense of focus to Alison's writing which a more generalised commentary often lacks. She ends her account of the interview with the footnote 'Martin and Jean were extremely interesting to talk to and I learned a great deal from them'. Clearly the chance to discuss what it's like to adopt children had been a valuable experience. Did the writing add anything? It is difficult to be categorical about this–but if Susan's remarks and Steve's are anything to go by ('It's like having a video-tape . . . ', '. . . because if you don't write it down you forget your first impressions . . .'), the act of writing it down may have helped to fix what was said in Alison's mind thus helping her also to be more clearly aware of her atti-

tudes to it. Writing gives a shape which doesn't blur at the edges with the passing of time.

A Range of Writing Opportunities

The writings that have been quoted so far have tended to be in the expressive function because we wanted to show how the flexibility of such a close-to-thought, close-to-talk writing can be be as appropriate and helpful to older pupils as it can to seven or eight year olds. Adolescents like comfortable clothes for playing and working in too—and expressive writing is not dissimilar to this kind of gear in the ease of movement it allows.

The original Writing Research Team have suggested that expressive writing is the matrix out of which the various forms of transactional and poetic writing grow: transactional on the one hand as a tool for *participating* in one way or another in the world's affairs, poetic on the other hand as a means of *contemplating* past experiences and of sharing our memories and reflections with a wider audience.

Susan's writing about her first visit to a geriatric hospital is a real mixture of these two stances—at one moment she is recollecting what happened and standing back to contemplate her feelings retrospectively, at other points in the writing she is speculating about what might happen in the future—almost planning in advance: 'I know that it is difficult to cope with old people and lift them around when you have got families of your own to deal with but I'd rather my parents died at home together or at least in familiar personal surroundings . . .'

This movement between spectator and participant roles is characteristic of writing which is 'expressive', but in some of the other pieces that we have quoted we can see how the *trend* of the writing is moving away from the expressive either towards a more informational or decision-making function or towards a more contemplative one. Steve's writing avout the Students' Demo would illustrate the former and Jenny B's writing about Edith, the latter.

There were examples in the writing of all the students whose work we have used, of pieces that could be classified as dominantly transactional or dominantly poetic. In other words, they were all capable of spreading out across the whole range of writing functions in work of their own choice. Again, the study of a project appeared to encourage this kind of diversity in so far as different writing functions helped the writer to explore the topic from different angles. Steve, for instance, who disliked what he called 'creative writing' (about 'Water and Wind' . . .) had this to say about the relevance of imaginative writing to project work:

> I write stories occasionally–yeh, it does appeal to me writing stories and writing creative things does–if–so long as I can pick what I want to do–you know–if I feel like writing a story . . . it tends to be to illustrate what, er, my factual work's in–say if I did, er, Vietman–a story might be about some Vietnamese child or other whose parents had been killed in warfare or something like that . . . I think it can be as helpful as having the factual thing. You know, one needs the other sort of thing, because I can write as much as I like about this factual thing in Vietnam–what the Americans are using, and what it does to your skin if it's napalm or–and the dates and things, but it still doesn't really explain what life's like in Vietnam–it just gives people a load of facts, a bit like having a computer.

In his own words Steve is explaining how writing in the poetic function is concerned to explore feelings. What he doesn't mention, however, is the other central characteristic of this function –its *presentation* of such feelings in an increasingly formalised fashion as a construct–a work of art which can be offered to the reader partly for him to contemplate and partly for pleasure. Here is an example, a poem written by Jenny B in a context very different from her visits to Edith:

Our love tree

We'd meet at our love tree everyday
And we'd hold hands and talk,
And sometimes, if we were in the mood
We'd go for a little walk.
Those were happy days I remember
In the beautiful days of summer
From June to September.
You bought a penknife one day

And inscribed our names on the tree,
I inscribed I loved you
And you inscribed you loved me.
We were so happy together
With the birds singing
And the lovely weather.
But with less holding hands and talking
We knew it wouldn't last,
So we kissed our love tree goodbye
And left it in the past.
Memories flow back
When I walk by our love tree
As it turns black.

By contrast, as an example of writing which is clearly transactional, here is a further piece from Alison's study on 'Adoptability' to show how, sometimes, generalised classificatory writing can serve an entirely appropriate writing function, especially when the student is basing what he or she writes on material already in print.

Adoptability

Perhaps the most difficult decision to be made directly concerning the child in adoption is whether or not he should be placed for adoption. It is generally agreed that for most children an adoptive home is better then a foster child's home, but it is not always as cut and dried as that. When possible the natural parents are encouraged to keep their child but the fact that the child has been taken into care in the first place indicates some sort of neglect or incapacity on the part of the parents and how does one decide at what point the neglect and rejection of the parents becomes such that it is no longer possible for the child to return home?

There are cases of children who have spent years in care and whose parents rarely or never visit but who still maintain that one day they are going to take the child back. How can it be decided whether or not there really is a parental tie between the child and his parents?

These are just two of the immensely difficult questions that the adoption worker has to answer when deciding whether or not a child should be placed for adoption. There are basically three reasons why many deprived children are not considered adoptible:

a) it is thought that the natural parents should retain their responsibilities

b) on the grounds of the child's health, heriditary background or emotional problems it is felt that adoption is too great a risk

c) the agency does not think that a suitable home can be found.

The subject of parental rights and responsibilities is one that a lot of people feel strongly about. Parents should be held responsible for their children's welfare is the general opinion and probably the right one . . .

This is highly competent transactional writing. Alison's own voice has receded into the background—the language is cool, the tone neutral. Because it is both competent and informative the audience for whom the writing is fully meaningful is public rather than personal—there is no need to rely on any inside knowledge of either the writer or the situation in which she is writing for it to be fully understood. To be able to write impersonally and analytically is certainly one of the increasing number of choices that the developing writer should be able to make.

The Development of Writing Abilities—Steve's Project

Finally to come back to Steve, in order to trace how an individual can develop and become aware of his own capacities to handle written language. He was half way through his fourth year at secondary school when I met him. At that stage he had a fat black ring file full of typewritten work which he had produced mostly since the previous summer. I borrowed this and was impressed by the variety of writings that it contained: reporting, generalising, speculating, putting forward his own opinions and commenting on other writers.

He agreed to jot down brief comments about why he had written each piece and what he had gained from it. In addition, I spent an evening talking to him about his work. The following points emerged.

He placed considerable importance on being able to discuss what he was working on with his teachers; at three different

places on the transcript he mentions this point.

> I sit in the classroom and, you know, just talk or discuss things with John* or any teacher who happens to be around. I like discussing things, I find it very useful, I talk to anybody . . .
>
> I find talking to teachers about, well, probably the second most valuable thing, and the most interesting I think.

(And the first most valuable thing would be–)

> Books–but I think that I find talking to teachers or talking to anybody about the–er, most interesting.

In fact Steve does most of his actual writing at home. He uses time in school for collecting materials or for talking.

> I think maybe I've got out of this habit of just getting one book and one worksheet and assuming that's everything–now I've got more into the habit of wandering round the whole school–you pick up interesting things in the science area occasionally, you know–I go to the Resources, I go all round the Pod† –sometimes it's the other Pod –or to the Resources or the Library–I just get as much as I can get and, er, sort it out from there.

He started writing extensively in his third year in the school, but looking back to his first big project (on 'The British Political System') he realises how much he has progressed since then.

> This was the first big project I did and now when I look at it I marvel at how pathetic it was. I say big project because it was bigger than anything I had done before but now when I look at it I realise that to get anywhere near the amount of information that should be in it, actually in it, then it should be a lot longer. I have placed emphasis on the wrong things and made all the mistakes I was warned about . . . But I have learnt more from that project than any other piece of work I have ever done at school so it was only a failure in terms of what it was, not what was learnt from it.

Steve has now discovered how to improve his writing in various ways. He has realised on his own account that he needs to structure it. Since 'The British Political System' he has developed his own methods for organising information gained from books,

*his form teacher

†a block of classrooms

which both improve the writing (at the level of structured generalisation) and, more importantly still, help him to assimilate it mentally.

> Well, I have to make a pattern—say this Vietnam project I did, I did a great section on Ho Chi Minh and there was so much information—there were books on it and newspaper articles and he was mentioned in every book about Vietnam and the Vietnam war and everything, so I sort of had to have a pattern in my mind—so what I did was get a bit of paper and wrote down basically what I was going to do about him, just set it out in stages . . . so I've got these bits of paper about all sorts of things dotted about in my folder . . .

Here is an extract from what Steve wrote as part of a longish piece in that project, about 'American Involvement in Vietnam'.

> For a time after the Geneva conference there was a shaky peace in the South and American troops were there called 'Advisors'—they were in Vietnam long after people stopped believing in this term. The Americans had now got themselves into a position that was very hard to get out of.
>
> American aid was first given to the French in Vietnam because the Americans thought they would get rid of the communist elements in the country by doing this, so the biggest nation in the world, a nation that one would expect to set an example was helping a country in the crime of trying to take over another country and even worse they were not helping them because they believed that the country was right in taking over the other country but because they thought that Communism was spreading too fast and they did not want it to spread any more. The situation was really nothing to do with the Americans it was just an excuse to get rid of the communists.
>
> It was stated in the Geneva agreements that elections were to be held in Vietnam in five years and it was also stated that no country was to set up military bases in Vietnam. America did not agree with this but said that she would not disturb it by force—she went on to violate both these agreements. America said that she sent aid to the government in Vietnam but as the government was run by an American puppet the Americans were just giving themselves help in the job of taking over Vietnam. Gradually more and more American troops went to Vietnam all of them being called advisors even when the country was involved in a definite war.
>
> The Vietcong were trying to liberate the country from the french and afterwards the Americans. Not all of them were communists some of them just wanted what should have been their right to be

> able to rule their own country. But the Americans mad on the thought that communists should be hunted out and destroyed went into the job of routing out the Vietcong only to be defeated nearly twenty years later.
>
> Vietnam became a testing place for all the new weapons of the day. The Americans in the South and the Vietcong to some extent, the North being supplied by the Russians and the Chinese. At one stage it was thought by some people that a nuclear bombardment of Vietnam was likely and that it would have started a third world war. Throughout the sixties and into the seventies the war raged in Vietnam. The Americans were now in a position extremely difficult to get out of.

Like Susan's piece about adoption, this is competent transactional writing. Steve has the situation in a sufficiently clear perspective as far as the sequence of events goes to be able to make a consistent interpretation about what happened. We may not necessarily agree with it, but in terms of the development of his writing ability, it is well on the way to being for a public audience rather than more narrowly for the teacher.

The most difficult piece of writing that he had tackled by the middle of the fourth year was a highly speculative piece called 'The Ultra Terrestrials'. In the commentary which he did for us on this piece he writes:

> This for people who do not understand the title is about U.F.O.s and is one of the few pieces of work in which I put forward ideas that are my own and not compare ideas of other people . . . Incidentally having gone into this piece of work with an open mind then disbelieving that they exist I come out of it with an open mind. But this is a subject into which I do not want to go too deeply. I have already stopped reading one book because of the complete change I found it was having on all my ideas. By change I mean a complete re-structuring from what we know at present. It may have been written by a raving lunatic on the other hand it may not. But whether I know U.F.O.s exist or not there is nothing I can do.

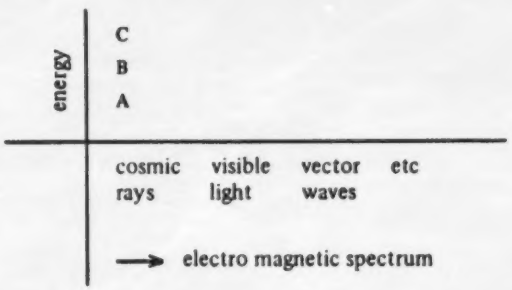
Restructuring our view of the universe (and our own place in it) can be a painful process whatever our age. We can sympathise with Steve's rather baffled resolution to stick to subjects which are not so unsettling–but the struggles in the writing that he did, in an effort to come to terms with a disturbing new theory,

interest us for two reasons. First, the speculations, derived from the idea of an 'electro-magnetic spectrum', are interesting in themselves—and fraught, as Steve can see, with new possibilities about the perception and the interpretation of reality. Second, they are also being handled in written language by a fourteen year old who has developed sufficient confidence in his own capacity to reason things out, to be willing to take on this kind of thinking about an abstract concept. Remember how in the original Writing Research samples, speculative writing only appeared in the seventh year and was rare even then. Steve, at fourteen, is able to speculate like this:

—We can say that we have four dimensions to move around in, we can move forward, sideways, upwards (if it was not for gravity) and we can and are doing all the time, move in time.

If we take this as our definition for these dimensions that say for two ordinary people to live without their lives overlapping while one of these dimensions is the same, then at least some of the others must be different.

—But what as we asked earlier are the dimensions of movement of these U.F.O.s? We could take a graph like this to give them two dimensions:



but this would not in fact work because as we understand it if we get the two life forms A and B then if they are separated only by their energy they would add to become life C. We could have beings of different frequencies having different energy but no two beings of different energy but the same frequency. We must also remember that the amount of energy these beings have is proportional to their frequency at the time and the higher that frequency is, the more energy they have. On the face of it it would seem that this is not one

of the other dimensions. But we must remember that on earth with humans there could be a point where all four dimensions became the same without the two human beings becoming merged into the same thing but with more energy. Still, we have two possible dimensions surely there must be more?

–What we could possibly have existing is an indefinite number of plains of life at different points on the electro magnetic spectrum there is no reason why they should deliberately come into the part of the spectrum of another life form but this might not be an intentional action just as we might do the same unintentionally to other life forms.

There is nc reason why these life forms should not be parallel to ours but just on a different plain of existence. They could have the same problems–have as much of the electro magnetic spectrum as us but just be in a different part of it. They might know as much as we do about U.F.O.s and could possibly see our aircraft which would to them appear as U.F.O.s.

–All the time we have been talking about life from a different frequency what do we mean by life? Life as we know it, well what is this–it is something that acts rationally we might think yet when we think about it there is nothing that acts more irrationally than a human being. Perhpas we could define life as something that is not at all logical rather than a machine that is logical. But this question is really too complicated to answer in a few words and it might be better to leave this question to poets and philosophers.

Steve ends up out of his depth–in fact he's never really been sure of his ground from the start (which after all is one of the features of speculation). But the value of the writing surely is that it provides him with a medium through which he can handle and try to make sense of these ideas which both interest and disturb him. Writing them down helps to hold them still enough (almost) for him to try and make them fit with what he knows about physics. What stimulated him to work at the possibilities in writing seems to be the sense that he was breaking new ground–trying to form his own theories from what he had read: 'one of the few pieces of work in which I put forward ideas that are my own . . .' Expressing one's own *opinions* is a relatively easy job, formulating one's own *ideas* is a different thing altogether; perhaps many teachers who read this pamphlet will have come across pupils in their fourth and fifth year in school who have been able to launch out into this kind of speculation but

so far we have seen very few examples of such writing in this age range; for us Steve's struggles represent a considerable and encouraging achievement.

Are pupils likely to write more–and more discriminatingly–if the range of writing audience and writing function is held open rather than closed down as they move up the secondary school? It is difficult to answer this question at all categorically, especially as the general pattern seems to be towards narrowing the range in the face of external examinations. Nevertheless the question remains: is a preponderance of classificatory transactional writing produced for a teacher who is regarded predominantly in an examiner/assessor role either educationally necessary or desirable? For the students whose written work we have used in this pamphlet, the reverse appears to be the case. They have demonstrated that when it is appropriate they can take up such informational writing adequately, but in addition they have also taken up other options–to write expressively, thoughtfully, sometimes tentatively about topics which genuinely concerned them. They have shown that it is possible to write for an unknown public audience. They have also, by their own account, engaged in using written language in the process of self-discovery, putting down their thoughts into words that can be read and returned to, as a valuable aid to learning.